

#18M

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Ezer WEIZMAN
 (Phonetic: VITESmahn)

ISRAEL

Minister of Defense
 (since June 1977)

Addressed as:
 Mr. Minister



[] The flamboyant and outspoken Maj. Gen. (ret.) Ezer Weizman is one of the most important members of the Cabinet: as Minister of Defense, he administers the occupied territories, and he belongs to the key Ministerial Committee on Security. []

[] Once considered a leading hawk on Arab-Israeli issues, he has emerged as one of the more pragmatic members of the government, stressing the need for greater flexibility and moderation in the Israeli negotiating stance with the Arabs. Weizman, whose popularity increased markedly because of his extremely active role in the Egyptian-Israeli peace dialogue, is considered the man most likely to succeed Prime Minister Menachem Begin should the latter step down because of illness.

The highly successful air force commander who in the 1960s developed Israel's potent preemptive air strike capability, Weizman moved easily into the job as Defense Minister. His first task there was to smooth transition in the Ministry and the Israel Defense Forces from a generation of uninterrupted Labor Party (LP) hegemony to the new Begin regime. A member of the ruling Likud bloc executive, Weizman managed the Likud campaign for the May 1977 Knesset (Parliament) elections, and the party's unprecedented victory over the LP was largely due to his efforts.

The Cabinet Moderate

Weizman's shift from extremely hawkish positions on Arab-Israeli issues has caused him several problems with--and in some cases placed him in open conflict

[] (cont.)

[redacted]
with--the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet. [redacted]

[redacted]
[redacted] he continues to be one of the most important and influential men in the government; [redacted] if he were to resign--as he has threatened to do in the past--the government could fall.

Weizman is credited with the recent more moderate policy of the Israeli military government on the West Bank toward the Arabs there. His approach has earned him guarded praise from West Bankers, strengthened his Arab constituency, and enhanced his credentials as a moderate. It has, however, also put further strains on his relations with Begin and other Cabinet hardliners.

Personal Data

Born in Haifa, Weizman is a nephew of Dr. Chaim Weizman, Israel's first President. After serving as a pilot in the RAF during World War II, he returned to Israel and headed the air arm of the Jewish underground organization Haganah in 1947. He became commander of the air force in 1958. After retiring from the military in 1969, he served as Minister of Transport and Communications (1969-70). He was active in private business for the next seven years. Weizman, 54, is married and has a son and daughter. He speaks English.

24 August 1978